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# MANUAL TRAINING AND THE POOR.

BY ELLIOTT FLOWER.

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“To a very large extent the benefits of manual training are lost to us because we begin it at the wrong end of the educational system.”

This statement was recently made by a man who has given a great deal of attention—in fact, most of his life—to the subject under discussion. While it is unquestionably an exaggeration to say that we begin it at the wrong “end” of the educational system, the idea that he intended to convey is made clear by the further statement that “manual training does not reach those who are most in need of it; or, to be more accurate, those most in need of it fail to reach manual training.” If that be the case, it ought to be easy to find it out.

The first question to be settled is: Who gets manual training under existing conditions? The second is: Who ought to get it? In answer to the latter question many advocates of that branch of education will insist that all ought to get it, or at least that all ought to get a certain amount of it; that the knowledge and training acquired in this way may be of incalculable advantage to the man who works principally with his head, as well as the man who works principally with his hands. Consequently, perhaps the second question should read: Who is most in need of it? Is it the boy whose tastes and mental ability put a profession within his reach, or is it the boy whose tastes and mental ability put a profession practically out of the question, while possibly a natural aptitude for mechanics makes anything in that line easy and interesting to him?

In discussing these questions it is my purpose to show, first, just how close manual training gets to the masses, and after that to consider the necessity of bringing it right down to them. To

that end I have looked into the requirements for admission to the manual training schools of various States, and have sought the views of those identified with both educational and philanthropic affairs, including State Superintendents of Education, and also workers in the slums. So far as possible, I shall let these answer the questions I have propounded; and I believe that what they say will show that most of us have been talking about the great good that manual training is doing without stopping to get the facts. Of course, there can be no doubt as to its value to those who get it, but it is probable that very few have stopped to think that it has been placed beyond the reach of more than nine-tenths of the children of the public schools. That is what confining manual training to the high schools means. More than nineteen-twentieths of the schools that have a course in manual training are maintained for less than one-tenth of the school population. Indeed, it is doubtful if the first fraction ought not to be larger and the second one smaller. And the strangest feature of it is that there seems to be little difference of opinion as to the value and necessity of manual training in the lower grades. In a few instances, a man who was requested to give his views has started out with a denial of the truth of the assertion that this form of education should be extended into the grammar schools, but he has usually ended by arguing for it.

Massachusetts furnishes as good an illustration of the condition of affairs as any State—in fact, a better one than most of them. She has given the subject a great deal of attention, and has a law that requires manual training to be a part of the course in high schools in all cities of 20,000 or more inhabitants. In addition to this, she has the outline of an ideal system of manual training, which has been made a feature of a report on that subject which has been prepared and issued under the supervision of her State Board of Education. It is as follows:

**“The ideal system for a large city would seem to include provisions for the following:**

**“1. Elementary training in processes that belong to the manual or domestic arts, such as a competent teacher with adequate equipment can give under average school limitations.**

**“2. In the higher grammar grades, the departmental plan with a differentiation of work, the boys going to the shop and the girls to the kitchen—a plan that is favored if the work can be kept within the limits of the building.**

**“3. An independent high manual training school that in organization**

and development shall not be impeded by the traditions and circumstances of existing schools, and that shall offer courses to the girls as well as to the boys.

"4. An opportunity for those taking full courses in an English or a classical high school to take manual training, so abridged that it may be carried comfortably in addition to their regular work."

That system certainly would bring manual training pretty close to the kindergarten, and would put it within reach of practically all scholars. It is furthermore in line with the views of Mr. Frank A. Hill, the secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, who has been connected with two of the best manual training schools in the State, and whose views, consequently, must carry a great deal of weight. Mr. Hill has this to say on the subject:

"My experience with the Cambridge Manual Training School and the Boston Mechanic Arts High School (I was head master of the English High School in Cambridge, and later of the Mechanic Arts High School in Boston) and my subsequent study have convinced me that a well-rounded education involves, to some extent, manual or motor education, and that such education should be free to all school children. There are endless varieties of such training, of course, and some are more precious than others; but training on the action side as well as on the purely sensory and reflective side is imperatively needed by every child. If the schoolboy did not get a good deal of wild, purposeless and unregulated exercise I do not know what would become of him. But the energy that would express itself in action must be gathered up, well-directed and utilized, if the child would make the most of himself, for the reaction of the activity of the mind is invaluable."

In view of the law, the "ideal" plan and the opinion expressed by Mr. Hill as the result of his experience, one would naturally expect to find Massachusetts especially favored in the line of manual training. But, unfortunately, theory and practice do not always go hand in hand. The report that advances the "ideal" theory also conveys the information that in only two cities is manual training carried below the high school grade. Salem provides a course in carpentry for boys of the grammar schools, and Springfield has introduced manual training into the highest two grades of her grammar schools. According to statistics of school attendance, which does not vary greatly in the different cities, Springfield has brought this branch of education within reach of about twenty-five per cent. of her public school scholars. That certainly is not a high percentage, but it is better than the ten per cent. average.

Practically the same conditions exist in New York, with the

exception that this training does not seem to be carried below the high school grades in any of the public schools of the State. In New York City there are one or two schools that bring manual training within reach of the very poor, but they are not connected with the public schools, and I shall discuss them later when I take up the work of philanthropists. So far as the public schools are concerned, State Superintendent Charles R. Skinner has made this statement:

"I think provision is made in nearly all the high schools of this State for a manual training course. More or less attention is given to it in the schools of New York City, and ample provision, I understand, is being made for establishing manual training departments in the new high schools now in process of erection there. So far as possible this training is open to all pupils, and when the boys especially are able to reach the College of the City of New York, which is in one sense a boys' high school, manual training is given to every pupil."

In other words, manual training courses are open to all—of the ten per cent. that get to the high schools. The other ninety per cent. must do the best they can without it. Mr. Skinner is rather cautious about giving his own views, but in quoting others he shows that the value of manual training in the lower grades is not overlooked, even if, as in Massachusetts, there is little of it except theory at the present time. Having explained what the State of New York has in this line, he continues:

"In a recent conversation with one of our city superintendents who has given this subject attention in the schools of his city, and who is very earnest in his advocacy of the system, he said: 'Manual training should be a part of the course of study for all children of all grades, because it is an essential part of any complete and symmetrical training, and because it will give to those who expect to enter any of the manual occupations an important part of the general preparation necessary for properly entering upon the special preparation for their trade or other occupation. Hence, I would first put it into the grade where all will get it. Our general courses have, in my judgment, been planned with special reference to those who are to enter clerkships or the professions. The great mass of people who must, and desire to, enter the manual occupations have a right to such an education as will fit them to take up the special preparation for these occupations. The public schools should not give special training, or instruction necessary for any occupation or profession until they can give it for all. In other words, we may not teach a trade, but we have as much right to do that as we have to train a physician.'

"Our superintendents differ in opinion with reference to the proper place for manual training in a school system. Many, like the one quoted above, believe in putting it in all grades of schools below the high schools. In this city (Albany) manual training is given little attention except in the high schools, the authorities believing that it should not be given generally to pupils in the grammar grades."

The authorities of the Albany public schools must be classed with a very small minority, but of course there must be a minority. If there were no difference of opinion at all, there would be little or nothing to discuss. The superintendent Mr. Skinner quotes expresses the views of the great majority, and very likely of Mr. Skinner himself. And yet this extremely valuable branch of education is beyond the reach of ninety per cent. of the school population of New York.

Pennsylvania undertook to introduce manual training into the grammar grades, but the plan had to be abandoned—not because it proved a failure or did not come up to expectations, but because the school attendance grew so that the rooms had to be used for other purposes. There are thirteen State normal schools that have manual training courses, Girard College with its excellent plant, and a few private or endowed institutions; but, as in all other States, little or no provision is made for the boy who does not reach the high school. Yet the value of manual training in the lower grades is fully recognized by State Superintendent N. C. Schaeffer, who has this to say about it:

“Among the ancient Hebrews every boy was expected to learn a trade. The boy Jesus worked at the carpenter’s bench. Among the Athenians the father who neglected to teach his boy reading, writing, swimming, and a trade could not in old age claim the support of a son whom he had thus neglected. Lord Rosebery, in a speech at Colchester, ascribes the recent advance of Germany in manufactures and commerce to the fact that for thirty or forty years the Germans have been ahead of the English in technical education. With the inventive genius that is characteristic of the American people we would have little to fear if our youth were generally taught the application of science to the arts, and if they had an opportunity to develop their talent for mechanical pursuits. Even a jack-knife in the hands of a boy who has had instruction in manual arts will do much to develop his taste and skill. The schools can never be made much better than the people want them to be, and there can be no great extension of facilities for manual training until the people generally perceive the educational and industrial value of this kind of instruction.”

Undoubtedly true. The feeling is widespread in some quarters that it is degrading to work with the hands, and everyone wants to stand behind a counter or learn a profession; but that false idea is rapidly wearing away, and, if educators are so nearly unanimous in their views, it ought not to be such a very difficult matter to convince the public of the public’s needs. In any event, the masses cannot be blamed for not attending schools that have been put beyond their reach.

Manual training, as a part of the public school system, is sup-  
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posed to have made greater progress in the East than in the West, so the Eastern States must receive the most attention in this article. However, it would not be fair to neglect the Middle and Western States entirely. Wisconsin has a manual training school, of which she is justly proud, at Menominee, and State Superintendent of Education J. Q. Emery informs me that in this school manual training is extended to the grammar grades and has been so extended for years. Mr. Emery, however, denies the premises upon which I have founded this article: He says:

"I am of the opinion that for a young man desiring to make mechanics his life work, preliminary training tending to quicken and broaden his intelligence is of great value. Mind is the great pioneer force in all the world's work, and in my judgment a well trained mind is the most practical of all things. It can be put into constant everyday use. I cannot, therefore, agree with the statement that a boy with a taste for mechanics rather than professional or mercantile pursuits finds the education that would be of most value to him beyond his reach. It may be, however, that the special training schools need some readjustment to meet more fully the needs of such a case."

I have no fault to find with this general statement, but I do not see why such preliminary training should be confined entirely to those things that will have a tendency to make good clerks or professional men. Neither does Mr. Emery apparently, for he adds:

"In my opinion manual training should not be confined to the school of the grade of high schools. In my judgment, some phases of manual training should be brought within reach of those who, because of handicaps, never reach the high schools. A law of Wisconsin authorizes the establishment of manual training schools in connection with the free high schools of the State, and school districts that are authorized to maintain free high schools are, by our statute, authorized to maintain manual training schools. When maintained in conformity with standard fixed by the State Superintendent such schools receive State aid. While we start with the high school, it is our plan to extend manual training to the grades below the high school. There are some phases of manual training that it has not been found practicable to carry below such grades, but where the work is practicable I am heartily in favor of its being provided in the grammar schools."

This is another case in which the intentions are most creditable, but if this plan were carried into other lines—architecture, for instance—would not the advice of the architect be: "In building a house always begin with the roof and work down to the foundations?"

State Superintendent of Education S. T. Black of California gives his views in fewer words than any of the others, but there

is no chance for any misunderstanding. After stating that "manual training is permitted in all our public schools and is practiced in many of our cities and towns" (presumably only in the high schools, although Mr. Black is not very clear on that point); that there are several private institutions, and that "the University will soon establish the Wilmerding Trade School," he adds: "The State ought to give every boy an opportunity to receive manual training."

To quote any more State Superintendents would be merely a waste of space, so far as the purpose of this article is concerned. Enough facts have been given to show that, except in rare instances, manual training for the poor is a delusion, and that the importance of providing for such training in the grammar and even primary grades is very generally recognized and admitted by the superintendents. But, before taking up the views of those who are working in the slums, or in other ways giving their attention to the needs of the very poor, it may not be amiss to add a little to the force of these views by giving the result of an investigation made by organized labor in Detroit last winter. The representatives of labor complained that the trade schools were beyond the reach of the poor man's children, and two or three people promptly took issue with them. To prove to them that they were wrong, an invitation was extended to a committee of the Detroit labor organizations to visit a manual training school at Toledo, Ohio, which, they were told, was all that they could ask. The invitation was accepted, and the report that the committee made upon its return home was to the effect that the school was beyond the reach of grammar school scholars, and, further, that of sixty-five scholars who were personally interviewed, only one could be properly termed a poor boy. The rest were sons of "retired merchants, bank tellers, superintendents, managers, clerks and so on," to quote from the report. The committee had no criticism for the school, except that it did not fulfil the requirements deemed essential—it was not for the poor boy, and consequently its educational merits could do him no good.

When it comes to a knowledge of the needs of the poor there would seem to be none better qualified to speak than Mr. James B. Reynolds, of the University Settlement Society of New York, and Miss Jane Addams, of Hull House, Chicago. Both are in



touch with that element of the population of the cities of which theoretical, and many practical, educators know so little, and both agree in regard to the necessity of placing manual training within reach of those who never get to the high schools. Mr. Reynolds has this to say on the subject:

"In regard to manual training in the public schools, I think it to be a radical defect of our school system that the rudiments of such training are not given in the primary and grammar grades. Of course, in the elementary schools no one would expect specialization, but a training in the use of the hands and the eyes and manual dexterity, such as is secured by the Sloyd system of training in Sweden, in my opinion, should be found in all our elementary schools. More than fifty per cent. of the boys in our public schools must earn their living by their hands, and yet the education in nearly all parts of the country is planned, if it has any particular value at all, to prepare one for a literary career. I use literary, of course, not in the technical sense, but to cover business and the professions. Education should not aim merely to develop the mind, but to fit boys and girls for life, and as life means work they should be prepared for work. Our public education is much too scholastic and needs to be thoroughly revolutionized."

The views of Miss Addams are well set forth in an address that she delivered before the National Educational Association in Milwaukee in July, 1897. In this she speaks particularly of the foreign element in our population—an element that has to be considered and that is responsible for many serious educational problems—and discusses it as follows:

"Let us take one of these boys, who has learned in his six or eight years to speak his native language and to feel himself strongly identified with the fortunes of his family. Whatever interest has come to the minds of his ancestors has come through the use of their hands in the open air; and open air and activity have been the invariable accompaniments of all their experience. Yet the first thing that the boy must do when he reaches school is to sit still, at least part of the time, and he must listen to what is said to him with all the perplexity of listening to a foreign tongue. He does not find this very stimulating, and is slow to respond to the more subtle incentives of the school-room. The peasant child is perfectly indifferent to showing off and making a good recitation. He leaves that to his schoolfellows, who are more sophisticated and who are equipped with better English. \* \* \* If that little Italian lad were supplied then and there with tangible and resistance-offering material upon which to exercise his muscle he would go bravely to work, and he would probably be ready later to use the symbols of letters and numbers to record and describe what he had done; and might even be incited to the exertion of reading to find out what other people had done."

There could be no better argument than this for the point I wish to make. There could be no better description of what manual training ought to do in the lower grades. It should not be put there solely for the purpose of teaching the child how to make a wooden box or how to handle a plane. This is incidental

merely. It should be put there as part of a general plan of education; to interest the boy and hold him in school as long as possible, and to see that, whenever he may have to leave, he has the best equipment for the battle of life that is possible in view of the time limitations. The lower grades now prepare him for the upper grades, but that is practically all. The system is planned with a view to the future of the child who completes the full course, but with no thought of the one who does not.

Continuing, Miss Addams shows in her valuable paper how many a boy "not of criminal descent nor of vagrant parentage" goes to the bad because school life, as it is unfolded to him, repels rather than attracts, and never under any circumstances succeeds in arousing the slightest interest. And, speaking of the boy who goes from the school to the factory upon reaching the factory age, she pertinently asks: "Has anything been done up to this time to give him a consciousness of his social value? Has the outcome of the processes to which he has been subjected adapted him to deal more effectively and in a more vital manner with his present life?" She answers that it has not. "He finds himself in the drudgery of a factory, senselessly manipulating unrelated material, using his hands for unknown ends and his head not at all. Owing to the fact that, during his years in school, he has used his head mostly and his hands very little, nothing bewilders him so much as the suggestion that the school was intended as a preparation for his work in life."

To clinch these arguments, I do not think I can do better than to quote the opinions of J. F. Reigart, Superintendent of the Workingmen's School of New York, and of Gabriel Bamberger, formerly Superintendent of the New York School, and now Superintendent of the Jewish Manual Training School of Chicago. These gentlemen are qualified to speak in a dual capacity—as authorities on manual training and as earnest workers among the poor. They not only know what manual training can and ought to accomplish, but they also know what the children of the poor need and ought to have. In a recent talk with the writer, Mr. Bamberger said:

"The poor children generally leave school in the fourth and fifth grades, and consequently the manual training schools of the public school system are of absolutely no value to them. I have no criticism to make of the schools themselves. They are as good as it is possible for them to be under the circumstances, but they do not reach the people. The Chicago High

and Manual Training School I know to be an excellent school, but only a child that has been through the grammar school and has spent one year in the high school is eligible for admission to it, and that bars, I think, all but about three or four per cent. of the children who are dependent upon the public schools for their education.

"One great disadvantage that we labor under in trying to extend manual training is the belief, which is quite general, that it is intended merely to make a boy skillful and fit him for work at a trade. That is part, but not all by any means. The method of teaching is the main thing in manual training, and a school with a workshop annexed is not necessarily a manual training school. The first principle of it is self-activity—mental and physical. The aim should be to teach the child to think in the workshop—not merely how to do a certain thing, but how to plan it in first place. It should be combined with the other branches of education and all should have it. In time all will have it. But until such time comes our aim should be to see that the poor get it. It is always within reach of the rich, if they want it. The mistake is that we begin at the top and creep down when we should begin at the bottom and climb up. Manual training cannot be begun too far down. Indeed, the kindergarten is the place to start it."

How well this fits in with what Miss Addams has said as the result of her experience among the poor; also with the views expressed by Mr. Reynolds as the result of his experience! Mr. Bamberger speaks as one who has not only worked among the poor, but who has brought manual training down to their children and has seen the results. Mr. Reigart has had similar experience, and he says:

"To my mind the chief problem in manual training is not provision for manual training high schools, but rather provision for elementary education—education for those boys who never will be able to take the high school or technical course. And even in the case of boys who do go to the advanced schools it seems to me important that they should have the elements of manual training early."

Now I come to the question, why, if all are so nearly of one mind, manual training has not been generally introduced into the lower grades of the schools, and the answer must be largely conjectural. I have heard only one argument advanced for keeping manual training in the higher grades, and that was advanced by a personal friend as a suggestion rather than an argument. It was to the following effect:

"By affording opportunity at an earlier stage of education than that of completing the grammar school for the pupil to acquire a trade or craft, will you not actually tempt him to abbreviate his education, instead of leading him to carry his preliminary training to a point of which it surely ought not to fall short?"

To this suggestion I have two answers. In the first place, I am of the opinion that the effect of taking up manual training

earlier would be just the reverse of that suggested, as I have already explained. I think it would hold many children in school who now leave in the fourth and fifth grades. In the second place, I hold that the educational system should be planned with a view to the greatest good of the greatest number; and to show about what proportion of the students now get any good—or, to be more accurate, reach a point where it is possible for them to get any good—out of manual training as it is now placed in the public schools, I will quote some figures from the Chicago Board of Education. I am told that these figures do not vary greatly in the large cities, and I use Chicago as an illustration merely because I happen to have comparatively recent figures for that city.

On January 1, 1898, the enrollment in the first grade of the primary department of the Chicago public schools was 42,372, and in the first grade of the high schools it was 3,624. That demonstrates, with sufficient accuracy for the purposes of this article, that not quite  $8\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the children who begin their education in the lowest grade of the public schools ever reach the grade in which manual training becomes at all an important factor. When I say this, I am aware that Chicago has a manual training course in the seventh and eighth grades of the grammar schools, but it is an elective course—taught in only three or four buildings, to which such scholars as wish go once or twice a week—and does not at all answer the purpose of a manual training course, as those who believe in such a course understand it. And even in the seventh grade only about  $25\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the first grade scholars get to it, according to the figures in the monthly school report. So I maintain that, if the idea of putting manual training at the top is to hold out an inducement to children to remain in school, it has proved a miserable failure and ought to be abandoned.

Another reason advanced for the comparatively little attention paid to manual training in the lower grades is that the workingman has suffered from the “universal optimism” that prevails, and is inclined to think that his boy never will have to work with his hands to earn his living; that he will be a professional man or a merchant. There may be some truth in this, but I am more inclined to think that the workingman has been so busy earning a living for himself and his family that he has not given the mat-

ter much attention; that he has taken for his son what was given to him (being told that it was the best there was to be had) and let it go at that. However, there are indications, as in the Detroit case I have quoted, that he is beginning to wake up to the exigencies of the situation, and the chances are that he would help rather than hinder any effort to put manual training within reach of his son. He certainly has taken very kindly to the few experiments that have been made.

Still another reason that I have heard advanced for the present condition of affairs deals entirely with the private or endowed institutions. It is asserted that, in many instances, they have not succeeded in getting in touch with their intended beneficiaries; that the men who have had the active management of some of them have been more anxious to have high grade schools that would rank with colleges or technological institutes, than to cater to the needs of those for whom the schools were intended. In support of this assertion it is pointed out that it is not an uncommon thing to find the children of the rich and the well-to-do getting into very close proximity to the slums, in order to take advantage of a school which was founded, and whose location was chosen, with a view to putting good manual education within reach of the poor; and I cannot deny that this assertion carries a good deal of weight in an argument of this description.

In any event, it seems to be very generally agreed that manual training should be put within reach of the poor; that, as matters are at present, only about 10 per cent. of the school population derive any real benefit from it; and that, as a general proposition, the other 90 per cent. stand much more in need of it. It would seem to me that Boards of Education should give their earnest attention to the matter—not as a side issue, a fad, a special study; but as a necessary and very important part of the educational system. And the man who next undertakes to endow a manual training school might “fill a long-felt want,” if he would take pains to see that it is put within the reach of those who cannot pay for a course, and who have neither the time nor the inclination, owing to the necessity of earning a living, to spend eight or nine years in preparing to begin it.

**ELLIOTT FLOWER.**